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Officer Accused of Soviet Contacts Said to Aid Inquiry

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WASHINGTON, May 30 — The military attorney for Second Lieut. Christopher M. Cooke, a 25-year-old Air Force officer who has been accused of unauthorized contacts with the Soviet Embassy here, asserted today that his client had been "cooperating fully" with an Air Force investigation "under promise of complete immunity."

Capt. Francis W. Pedrotty, reached by telephone at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia, said that he intended to file a copy of that promise along with affidavits from Air Force investigators with the Court of Military Appeals here "to expedite the release of my client."

In addition, Lieutenant Cooke's mother, Mrs. Richard C. Cooke of Richmond, Va., contended that the Air Force had "reneged" on the agreement by placing her son in what the Air Force called "pre-trial confinement" at McConnell Air Force Base near Wichita, Kan.

A spokesman for the Air Force at Strategic Air Command headquarters in Omaha said he could not comment on the alleged promise of immunity.

Lieutenant Cooke, the deputy commander of a Titan intercontinental ballistic missile crew, based near McConnell Air Force Base in Kansas, was charged last night on three counts of violating Air Force regulations in making three unauthorized visits to the Soviet Embassy from December 1980 to May of this year. If convicted, he would face up to six years in prison, loss of pay and allowances, and less than an honorable discharge.

Air Force spokesmen said that the investigation was continuing and that additional criminal charges such as espionage were possible. But an Air Force spokesman emphasized that no such charge had been filed so far. The Air Force said it was the only authority conducting the investigation.

The case, as reconstructed in conversations with Capt. Pedrotty, Lieutenant Cooke's parents, his college professors, and other sources appeared to leave a tangle of unanswered questions about what really happened and why.

Lieutenant Cooke was described as an earnest, intelligent young man with an interest in Soviet-American relations and in nuclear missiles. After graduating from Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Va., Lieutenant Cooke attended the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Va., where he earned a master's degree in political science in what a professor called "near-record time."

Late that summer, Lieutenant Cooke was designated the Deputy Missile Combat Commander of a four-man crew in a Titan silo. As such, he had access to information on the alert status of the missile, its state of maintenance, and the communications and code system used in the event it was to be fired.

Lieutenant Cooke's father said that the lieutenant "had a top-secret clearance. But he talked very little about his work." Mrs. Cooke added, "We didn't ask him questions." An Air Force official said that all codes and other systems that could be changed had been changed after Lieutenant Cooke had come under investigation.

First Alleged Visit Last Year

Lieutenant Cooke first went to the Soviet embassy on 18th Street here in December 1980, according to the Air Force. He went twice more, on undisclosed dates, between then and early May.

Why he went there, who he saw, how long he stayed, and what happened could not be determined. Air Force officials said that those were among the questions under investigation. In addition, Air Force officials were unable to explain why five months passed before Lieutenant Cooke was questioned.

The officials said, however, that Lieutenant Cooke was picked out by routine surveillance that the Air Force maintains over officers in sensitive positions. In addition, the Federal Bureau of Investigation closely monitors visitors to the Soviet Embassy and photographs most of them.

Lieutenant Cooke's father said that on May 5, while his son was home on a 15-day leave, an officer from the Air Force's office of special investigations called. "Five minutes later, they were here," he said.

The investigators took Lieutenant Cooke to Langley Air Force Base, where he was interrogated. But not until May 9, was Captain Pedrotty appointed his counsel, the attorney said. About that time, Lieutenant Cooke was given the promise of immunity, Captain Pedrotty said.

Lieutenant Cooke's master's thesis was an examination of tactical nuclear planning and how it fit into American foreign policy, according to his adviser, Prof. Alan J. Ward. The thesis argued, Professor Ward said, that the United States must treat the use of nuclear weapons as credible because this country was out-manned by the Soviet Union.

Professor Ward remembered Lieutenant Cooke as "an enormously hard worker." He also said, "There was nothing to suggest aberrant or bizarre behavior." Prof. Donald J. Baxter, then chairman of the government department at William and Mary, concurred and said that he had written letters of recommendation for Lieutenant Cooke.

Applied for C.I.A. Job

In the spring of 1979, as he was finishing his studies, Lieutenant Cooke applied for employment at the Central Intelligence Agency, according to his father. But after spending the summer with his family in Richmond, entered the Air Force in September, his father said. Air Force records showed that he entered in December, an Air Force spokesman said.

Mr. Cooke also said that his son received a letter from the C.I.A. that fall saying that officials there would like to talk to him about employment. Mr. Cooke said, however, that his son did not say anything else about the intelligence agency.

Dale L. Peterson, a spokesman for the Central Intelligence Agency, said that Lieutenant Cooke had applied unsuccessfully twice at the agency.

The first time, Mr. Peterson said, was in 1978, when Lieutenant Cooke, still a college student, applied for a summer intern job.

Lieutenant Cooke applied a second time the following year, Mr. Peterson said, and his application for a staff position was returned to him with a notation that there were no openings at that time for a person with his educational background.

Missile Training on Coast

Air Force officials said that Lieutenant Cooke, after completing officer training school, was sent to Vandenberg Air Force Base in California for missile training. They also said that while in training and orientation, he was told of the regulation requiring that all contacts with representatives of Communist nations be reported to superior officers.

In June 1980, the Air Force officials said, Lieutenant Cooke was assigned to McConnell Air Force Base in Kansas where he was given further training on the Titan intercontinental ballistic missile, the oldest but biggest missile in the American arsenal.